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Subject: The Spirit of God.

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OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

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in effect, "Except a man, baptized with water, be likewise baptized *with the Holy Ghost*, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

Christ brought into view, distinctly, a conception of the Divine Spirit which was not unfamiliar to the Jewish mind, and which, as we shall see in the sequel, was understood in a general way, though not specially, by Nicodemus himself.

I suppose that from the beginning of time there has been a general impression among men that this world was acted upon by minds or spirits outside of itself; that, if I may so say, the waves from other spiritual conditions have rolled in upon its shores; that it is not isolated.

Among the modern discoveries, there is nothing more striking than the fact that the unity of creation does not interfere with the belief that there is a spiritual unity as well as a physical unity; that in the construction of the whole universe we are but a fragmentary part; that there do come in upon this world influences, mental and spiritual, from outside of it; that upon the minds of men there are influences which spring, not simply from the visible creation, but also from invisible sources. This is certainly the doctrine of the New Testament.

The inspired and authoritative teaching of both the Saviour and the apostles (though by the apostles not so much as by the Saviour) was, that divine and demoniac influences did come in upon the human soul in this world; and in so far as divine influences are concerned, such a truth is to be eminently desired.

It is a thankless task to disprove that which is asserted. It is the tendency of those who are pursuing physical science to repel anything which is not able to stand the test of the senses. Therefore there is, on the whole, a disposition to repel any doctrine of spiritualism. It is even treated with scorn by many, by most, who neglect that great inchoate realm, that will not down, and yet will not affirm; that will not be still, and yet will not answer. The questions that are put to-day, the vagrant and anomalous spiritual theories of our time, are simply despised by science on grounds which carry the feelings of the skeptical part of the scientific mind.

Now, I aver that there is nothing which men so much need, nothing which men ought so much to desire to be true, nothing that men ought to accept so willingly, as this doctrine that there is wafted over into this sphere a divine power, a spiritual influence, which wakes up the better part of man's nature. It is not to be desired that there should be a demoniac influence, though it is not to be denied that there is; but certainly the transcendent doctrine of the New Testament is that the Divine Spirit is given to men in this

world, may be given to all, and is effectual upon very many. It fits and harmonizes with our idea of the higher life toward which we are groping our way.

We go forward in knowledge step by step. At the very best we know but little. It doth not appear what we are, nor what we shall be. We are conscious of aspirations and yearnings and longings; but we do not know how to locate them, nor how to proportion them. Some of the most notable hours of our experience are hours in which there is a wild concourse of feelings, formless and vague, full of dissatisfactions. There are glorious fruitions which come to us; but they are only for the moment; they are transient. That which every thoughtful man of any depth of moral nature most desires, is that there should be an influence, divinely directed, which should teach us the meaning of our own thoughts and feelings, and the reason of our aspirations, and that should guide us insensibly and rationally along that line by which we are to reach from the animal to the angelic or the divine.

This truth of the divine influence exerted upon the heart of man is not to suffer doubt from the fact that fantastic and false notions have prevailed in all ages and in all religions on this subject. While men are going through periods of ignorance, they are superstitious; but as they grow more and more intelligent, one by one they drop these notions of formless spirits, of vague invisible influences which are supposed by the imagination of uncultured men to fill the heaven. As men learn better how to use their minds these notions are dropped, and they come to more stable views.

This is the reasoning of men, but I do not understand how they can account for the fact that the universal tendency of the human mind has been away from the physical and toward the spiritual. It is admitted that men existing in their natural states are but savage and animal; that the senses are pre-eminent; that the passions take precedence in power above all other parts of the human mind. We know that the earlier conditions of the human race have been animal. And tell me how it is that out of the low and animal condition which the race has been in has grown a strong sense of invisible and spiritual influences? Where did it come from? The race, before its civilization and Christianization, being animal, whence came there into it the conception of a free spirit and of the illumination of it? It is not natural to a lower state of the mind. It is not natural to the lower faculties. It is a development of the very highest form, as we learn, and yet, it began with the race. It had its beginning as far back as we have records. This faith in the influence of the Divine Spirit upon the hearts of men is one of

the struggling elements. And did it not touch a conscious need? Was not this universal feeling after some obscure truth the indication that that truth was working upon the hearts of men? Was not the Divine Spirit recovering from these lower conditions of humanity the germs of things that were to eventuate in intelligence and higher spirituality?

The fact that men had rudely apprehended this truth does not militate against its reality. Men sought chemistry through alchemy, which was loaded down with all manner of absurdities and even superstitions; and yet they were seeking after a verity, and they found it at last. Men sought astronomy through astrology, with all its superstitions and extravagances, and it is no presumption against astronomy that it was preceded by such a system of misconception and distortion. What if the notions of men in early times respecting spiritual influences were crude? What if many of them have fallen to the ground? What if to a great degree they were fictitious? The universal feeling after such a truth, the universal belief in such a truth, and the universal consciousness of the need of such a truth, are not to be ignored. On the other hand, they constitute a very strong presumption that this truth is real. The mere seeking of an object does not, to be sure, prove that object to exist; but when on other grounds strong evidence is found of the existence of any truth, then the leaning of men toward it corroborates, though it may not prove it.

In this discourse of our Master, you will observe that while he takes for granted this divine and spiritual influence, he declares (and it is to me one of the evidences of divine wisdom) that it is not possible for men to understand such things; that is, that the truth of the higher sphere is so unlike anything that we know on earth, that it cannot be made comprehensible to our faculties here.

"If I have told you of earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man, which is in heaven."

It is impossible to interpret a higher sphere to a lower sphere. We can have some dawning intelligence in respect to the existence and agency of the Divine Spirit; but a perfect comprehension of it we cannot have. Hence, this great truth cannot be unfolded in its detail and in its philosophy as if it were an earthly truth. Nor can all the questions which may be asked concerning it be answered; nor can all the curiosity which may be excited with reference to it be satisfied. But there are certain points in regard to the Divine Spirit which I think Scripture does make plain, and experience corroborates.

We are not to suppose, first, that it is a supersession of the faculties of man. It is not an attempt of the Divine Mind to put its action in the place of our action. In so far as we can gather from the words of sacred Writ, and in so far as we can gather from the conduct of men, where they are expressly declared to be under the divine influence, it would seem as though the Spirit of God stimulated development—wrought into it a higher activity.

Now, this giving to the minds of men a higher action; this lifting them up into a sphere of activity which they have not known before, and so changing all their feelings and experiences, is called a "new-birth," where it dominates and becomes constant. The activity of a mind under the divine influence is what is meant. The Spirit wakes up the dormant power of the mind in spiritual things; and, therefore, it is said: "The Spirit helpeth our infirmities." All that which we need, so far as the senses are concerned, is manifested to us. The eye has its provocations. The ear has its stimulations. Every part is provided with the forces by which it can be developed and sustained. Society ministers to the social wants of men and, to a limited degree, it ministers to their moral wants; but where shall you find anything which lifts a man above and toward the unembodied—toward the invisible—toward that great realm of truth, in the direction of which manhood develops? In every age of the world those have been periods of growth in which men have most believed in the invisible and the infinite; and those have been shrinking and backward-going periods in which men have been shut up, almost, to their senses.

There is provision made for the lower nature by the structure of the physical globe, and by the structure of society; but when we rise to a higher thought of manhood, to something that is invisible and infinite, then it is that we need help. We need something that shall body forth our conceptions, and direct them. That is the work of the Divine Spirit, which reaches out to our spirit, and quickens it, and enlightens it, and guides it, and more especially, arouses it. This is called "the kindling light in us." It awakens the understanding. It stimulates the moral sense. It gives vitality and force to all those elements which go with the moral sentiment. It is called, therefore, the "enlightener of the mind." It is declared to be a spirit of comfort, of consolation and of cheer. Men who have all that their senses desire, and who are living for the present, do not feel the need of it, and do not miss it if it be absent; but the great mass of mankind are not living in circumstances of comfort or of attainment. The race of man, for the most part, are living in conscious imperfection. Their desires

are being broken off every day. Men are living with a consciousness of ill-desert and shortcoming and guilt, and they know not how to comfort themselves. Since the world began, men have been turning every way and seeking, by one means or another, to appease and quiet their conscience. It is the office of the Divine Spirit to comfort men, to console them, as well as to arouse and stimulate and enlighten them. It keys the soul up to its highest activity in its best parts.

You may ask me, "Is not this the very natural order of the mind itself? Are you not simply describing the functions of the higher faculties? What need is there of any conception of things over and above that which is inherent in the soul of man?" But we are often conscious that we are lifted up, not by our own automatic activity. We are conscious, oftentimes, that we are influenced by a spirit outside of our own, mysterious, acting not when we should have expected it, according to the conditions of our minds.

While it doubtless is true that the activity of the Divine Spirit, and the methods of that activity, transcend our notions, yet, in one sense, it is understandable. We can prepare ourselves so that we shall become consciously recipient of this divine influence. A man may prepare himself for friendship, and may prepare himself for society, according to the nature of the relations into which he is going. If it be for pleasure that he is to prepare himself, he throws off care and burden and, as it were, raises into activity that part of his mind by which he enjoys. If it is a company of artists into which he is going, he prepares himself to be influenced by their peculiar tendencies. If he is going among friends where his social faculties are to be brought into play, he as it were rouses up those faculties in him so that they shall be in the highest state of activity. If he is going where there is to be music, it is for this that he prepares himself. We are conscious that we receive influences from each other by preparing the mind to be susceptible to those influences.

So it is in the power of a man to prepare his soul to be acted upon by the Divine Spirit. Not that he is not acted upon at all times; but he may prepare himself so that he shall be acted upon the most favorably. There would be summer if there were not a farmer; but the farmer knows how to make summer work to advantage for him, as otherwise it would not have done. There would be flowers if there were no florists; but the florist knows how to make the sun bring forth exquisite color and forms, as it never would have done if it had not been for his interposition and preparation.

There would be the universal influence of the Spirit of God, doubtless, if every human being were swept off from the face of the earth. There has been a universal Spirit of God which has brooded over the race of man from the beginning, and that has been bringing out, little by little, the nobler qualities of human nature; and this universal Divine Spirit will doubtless be still active; but by meeting the Divine Spirit, by preparing for it, by opening the soul to its influence, and by co-operating with it, men have made themselves recipient of greater blessings, a thousand-fold, than they would have received from the unassisted divine influence.

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure."

This co-operative labor is just as necessary in spiritual as in material things. In extracting wealth from the earth, or hidden treasures from the air, all natural influences conspiring, a man specializes these influences by the application of them to the object which he has in view; and in securing spiritual blessings, a man specializes the generic influences of the Divine Mind.

Not only can we prepare ourselves to make the soul fructify under the divine light and warmth, but we can also resist these influences. The divine influence is cogent, but it is not irresistible in any proper sense of the word. Where men set their will against it; where they put themselves under the influence of feelings which are antagonistic to it; where they resist the tendencies that would be developed if they were to yield to it, they certainly can set it aside. I do not say that, if it pleased God, he might not press his influence irresistibly upon men; but experience shows that such is not the ordinary procedure of Divine Providence. We are to be made willing in the day of his power. The strivings of God's Spirit have proved futile in the thousands and thousands of mournful instances where persons did not know the day of their welfare. That day has dawned upon them; they have felt strange movements within them, and they have set over against them antagonistic feelings. How many men are roused up and have yearnings for something better than they have, who do not understand the influence that is operating upon them, and sweep it away by social jollity! How many times do they make nature stand as a culprit before their higher nature! How often do they feel discontented with things which before pleased them! How frequently do they empty the cup and find that it no longer has in it any pleasure for them! How common it is for men to go over the statistics of their past experience, and find that life has not fulfilled all that it promised!

Doubtless these feelings are awakened by the power of the Spirit. They are the results of the action of the divine influence on the soul. If I may say so, they are the waves of the heavenly life beating on the shores of this life.

Men set themselves at work to put out these unpleasant feelings, or to push them to one side. They involve the relinquishment of states which they are not willing to part with, or the performance of duties which they are not willing to fulfill. And so they do not come into concord with the soul of God.

I suppose every man has been the subject of divine importunity. I can scarcely conceive of one who has not in some way been reached by the Spirit of God. Certainly no man who has been reared under Christian institutions, who has been surrounded by Christian friends, and who has learned in the sanctuary the higher truths of the Christian religion, has been left free from the divine influence. It may not be recognized as such. I do not suppose it is recognizable. I do not suppose any man can tell what is simply the action of his own mind, and what is the action of the Divine Mind, for the reason that the Divine Mind stirs ours to act.

If you ask the flower, "How can you tell that which the sun does in you, and that which you yourself do?" the flower cannot tell. The sun wakes it up to do that which it does. Otherwise it would not be done.

The Divine Spirit wakes up a man to do that which is higher than the ordinary level of his experience or endeavor. And you cannot discriminate between the man's own action and the action of the Divine Spirit manifested through him.

Many men sit in judgment upon pleasure and other outward influences because they are followed by the opposite qualities—sadness, etc.—which are called "reactions"; but very likely these are just the ways in which we might suppose the divine influence would come in upon men. For, although hours of fullness and power are better for some things, for other things these reactionary hours are better.

There is scarcely a man who has not had hours of longing and yearning for better things. They may have been vague; they may have taken on strange and unexpected and inexplicable forms; they may have been closely allied to secular elements; but even in the poorest of them there has been a divine influence which has been working to draw the man upward. Inferiority never strives to rise higher without that touch of divinity which makes the best part of a man desire to enlarge; to go up; to augment in excellence. And there are very few who have not felt this touch. I should be sorry

to think that there were any who had been reared under Christian influences who had not many and many a time had yearnings for higher and better things, and shed tears because they had gained so little.

Men begin the battle of life with high courage. They are heroes very soon. For the most part they mean to live a life of untainted honor. They mean to carry sentiment and enthusiasm into all their ways; and they do for a time. But the battle proves too hard for them; and they yield here and there. They lower their tone in one direction and another. And by and by, when years begin to touch their hair with frost, and they look at what they meant to be and what they are, there is a sadness that spreds over their heart. There is a great disparity between that which they aimed at and that which they have attained. The sense not only of inferiority, but of sinfulness and of remorse under the inspiration of guilt, fills many and many a heart. Is there not the striving of the Spirit with such a one? Does nature do these things?

The greatest boon conceivable is the presence of this quickening influence. The loss of it is the greatest misfortune which is possible to any human being. It is the life of the soul in its highest regions. It is because these influences are vincible, it is because men are likely to overslaugh them, it is because worldly tides rise and sweep out this blessed current from the heavenly land, that we are exhorted not to grieve the Spirit of God whereby we are sanctified.

There is no other business in this world that is half so important as character-building. He that is building his soul is building to good purpose. He that is only building his property is building for the worm and the dust. He that is making the manhood in him tower high, and broaden, and is nourishing it, is a wise master-builder. He that is heaping up outward things alone, is working for an hour.

If there come to you, my friends, those influences which make you hate evil as you did not hate it before, believe that they are from God. If you find that there are influences which inspire nobler anticipations of virtue, and a nobler ideal of heroism in life; if there comes to you a light which makes living Christianly seem more real and more earnest than ever before, believe that this light and these influences come from the battlements above, guiding and inspiring you. If there comes to you at times the consciousness of communion; if that of which at other times you long for even a momentary gleam comes to you as an experience of hours or days, and it seems to you as though there was a God, and as though he were very near to you, believe that there is a God, and that he has

found you, and that there is moving upon your soul a divine influence which is not of this world, but of the heavenly land.

Oh, do we not all of us want, more than everything else, to be better than we are? Do we not all of us, more than everything else, want to separate ourselves from mere physical circumstances and become men? Is there a man that has the consciousness of character and of being, is there one that respects himself, is there one that knows the worth that is in him, who can endure the thought of going down into the grave to annihilation? Is there a man who can bear to look into the future and say, "When forty years have gone, what shall I be? Well, a prosperous man. When fifty years have gone, what then? A prosperous man still. Rich. When sixty years have gone, what then? Still prosperous, still rich, and respected. When seventy years have gone, what then? Riches no longer enjoyable. Life quivering. The old man looking out upon that dark valley which is not far before him, says, 'Who will guide me across? Where is the bridge? who is the pilot? where is the ford?'" When a man looks out on the valley and shadow of death, is there anything that he can desire with his soul, and with the deepest feelings of his soul, more than a light to shine upon the road which leads him to the heavenly land?

It is the blessed function of the Divine Spirit to give inspiration in life; to give light along the path of duty; to create yearning in men; to lead them up to the new life of the love of God in the soul; and then to point out the way in which the spirit is to tread, and to point upward where the spirit is to dwell with the spirits of just men made perfect, and in the presence of the throne of God.

I know there are many in my hearing who have often been called by the Spirit away from evil and toward good. Many of you have heeded the call; you have accepted the divine influences; you have been recreated; you have been put upon higher ground; songs of rejoicing have been put in your mouth where once were words of sorrow; your faith is fixed, and you are living in a heavenly mood, in expectation of the heavenly land. There are others who have been again and again striven with by this divine influence. This quickening Spirit, the soul's Schoolmaster and Guide, has been near you, and you have refused utterly to give heed to it. You have turned back from it again and again. It has impressed you often and often, and as often pleasure or business has turned you away from the sacred drawing. And to-night, while I speak, there are some hearts that palpitate.

The Spirit works chiefly through the channel of revealed truth, through God's word; and if there be those who listen to-night with

tender heart, with a longing conscience, with an earnest desire for a better life, let them take heed. Again to them comes the offer of God's forgiveness, recreation, guidance, love, victory, and eternal salvation.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

We rejoice, our Father, that we have found our way unto thee, not by the seeing of the eye, nor by the hearing of the ear, nor by the reaching out of the hand, but by thine influence shed abroad upon our hearts. We have been made to know thee, whom to know aright is life eternal. We thank thee for the communication of thy Spirit. We thank thee for its cleansing influence, its enlightening power, its comforting effect. We thank thee that thou art indeed the light of the world, so that those who sit in darkness may see a great light arising upon them. We rejoice, O Lord, that thou dost not withhold the measures of thy grace. Thou dost pour forth from thine own being, upon all thy creatures, the energy of thine own nature, and thou givest them life from out of thine own life, and they are conserved by thy thought and power and care. We rejoice that there is no such care as thine. If we could see behind the mystery of providence, if we could see the ends as well as the beginnings, if we could see the processes, we should know that all things are working together for good to them that love thee. We know that all things in this life are working for good to those who love thee. To be stayed upon thy love is itself sufficient, in the midst of trouble, to lighten burdens, and lift upon the heart the cheer of hope. We rejoice that there are so many who are witnesses of the power of God, not only to forgive sin, but to sanctify that providence which comes from forgiveness of sin and from reconciliation with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. We rejoice that there are so many who have been made patient by their faith in thee; so many who have been made enduring; so many who have been made strong; so many who have been made faithful. And we beseech of thee that thou wilt increase the number of those who shall follow after thee, being called of thee, and shall possess thy spirit. We pray that the truth spoken in this place from day to day may be blessed of God to the awakening of men, and to their conversion, and to their edification in the Christian life. May those of thy servants who carry the Gospel to those around about them call men by their speech, and more by their influence; and to this end may thy Spirit dwell with them. May there be such light and warmth and cheer in every one who is named of thee as shall make men draw near to him, and to the Saviour, by whom they they are called, and by whom they are redeemed.

If any that are here are looking wistfully toward the Christian life, not knowing its meaning, nor how to compass it, Lord, wilt thou guide their unsteady step. If there are those who are uncertain and wavering, upon whom doubts rest as the darkness of the night, we pray that thou wilt remove all the questionings which envelop them, and give them the clear light of experience. If there are those who have backslidden, and who remember the times of light and joy, and fain would return, Lord, draw

them to thee. And draw others, by them, to thee. We pray for those who long since ceased to pray. We pray for those for whom parents, now gone, once prayed—the children of faith and of consecration. If there be those who have for a long time forgotten their fathers' God, may that time at last cease, and may they return to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls.

We pray for all manners and conditions of men—for those within and those without; for those who listen to the word of truth and those who are scattered as sheep without a shepherd. May the Gospel be sent out, and everywhere may it accomplish its work. We pray that thy kingdom in which dwelleth righteousness may come more and more, and the earth be filled with thy glory. And to the Father, the Son and the Spirit shall be praises evermore. *Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

Our Father, we pray that thou wilt grant that the light of truth may shine upon every heart. Thou that dost release the day from the night, and that drivest the darkness quite away, canst thou not, by thine infinite power, bring light to the souls that are in darkness. Are not these thy children, borne by thee through the realms of time? Are they specks that are meant to perish? Hast thou not stamped every soul with immortal life? Draw every soul toward thee, O thou great Center of love, and wisdom, and goodness, and joy; and grant that every one may be sensitive, and may recognize the day of privilege—the opportunity which is brought near to him by the striving of thy Spirit.

We pray, O Lord, that thou wilt comfort those who are not comforted. Confirm those who are beginning the Christian life. We pray that thou wilt cause those who have walked therein to let their light shine, and let their joys be borne to those around about them. And so may thy kingdom come in many hearts, and thy will be done therein, as in heaven.

We ask it through Christ, the Beloved, to whom, with the Father and the Spirit, shall be praises evermore. *Amen.*

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